

Christ Church Elbow Park Archives

Interview with Meredith Cashion

Christ Church Elbow Park Oral History Project 2020

Interviewer: Catherine Evamy

10 December 2020

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Zoom Interview

Transcript of Meredith Cashion

Interviewed on 10 Dec. 2020

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Interviewed by Catherine Evamy

Catherine Evamy, Interviewer

Meredith Cashion, Narrator

Catherine Evamy: My name is Catherine Evamy, and the date today is the 10th of December, 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I am distance interviewing with Christ Church parishioner, Meredith Cashion. This interview is being recorded for the Christ Church archives, and will be made available to researchers. You will be given a transcript of the recording and will have the opportunity to review it and reconsider any portions of the interview at that time. Is that okay with you?

Meredith Cashion: Yes.

Catherine: I'm really pleased that we've got this opportunity and thanks for your time. Please tell us something about where you were born and went to school and your early years.

Meredith: I was born in Vancouver. I went to high school in Vancouver, and then after high school, I was an *au pair* in Paris for a year and a half. During that time, my parents moved to Calgary with my father's accounting firm. When I was finished with my *au pair* job, I came to Calgary to go to university. As I finished university, my father was on the Alberta Ballet board and one of the members was Pat Cashion. I met Pat through my parents and actually he was dating my aunt at the same time. We met as I was finishing my university degree and we started dating. We married in 1983 and have lived in Calgary ever since. I consider myself an Albertan.

Catherine: What did you take your degree in?

Meredith: I have a degree in political theory. Actually Tom Flanagan, a parishioner at Christ Church, was one of my profs.

Catherine: Have you used your degree in a career since?

Meredith: No, I have not. Because I had spent two years in France, when I finished my degree I was 24, and I had recently got married, and when I got pregnant, I was extremely ill. I have not used my degree and have really not had a job.

Catherine: For money.

Meredith: For money.

Catherine: Because you've been in Paris for awhile, you speak French fluently?

Meredith: I can understand French fluently. I probably don't speak it fluently. All our children went through French and my daughter and son-in-law both have spent time in France. She spent years taking a MBA there. We have been to France a number of times. We have friends there and we continue to see the young man that I was an *au pair* for, as well as his parents. We've done two house exchanges in Paris. We now have friends and we try to go there every second year.

Catherine: Does Pat speak French?

Meredith: Pat has an unbelievable ability for languages. Yes, his French is better than mine in terms of accent. I would say I understand more, but he sounds more like a French person when he is speaking.

Catherine: Did you stay in Calgary when you came from Vancouver with your parents to Calgary?

Meredith: Yes. I have two brothers who are still in Vancouver and my parents have subsequently moved back to Vancouver.

Catherine: When did you start attending Christ Church?

Meredith: We were married at Christ Church in 1983. Caitlin was born in 1984. We probably didn't attend regularly until 1986 when Daniel was born. Then when our two children were baptized, we started going on a regular basis. I became involved in the Sunday school, the nursery, Anglican Church Women. In the early and mid-'80s, I did a lot of social events for Christ Church. We put on Italian dinners and French dinners; they were fundraisers for the ACW.

Catherine: How regular with these dinners?

Meredith: They were probably about every three to four months. Because there was quite a large group of us who had small children at the same time, they were extremely well attended and we would make all the food ourselves. If we were having an Italian night, we would do lasagnas, or if we were having a French night, we would do beef bourguignon. We had a lot of fun and we raised quite a bit money.

Catherine: What did the Anglican Church Women at that time use the funds for?

Meredith: They've always used funds to promote things in the parish. A lot of things were to improve the kitchen, or they gave money to the Altar Guild for certain things. We supported the Rector's Discretionary Fund. Oftentimes, they would give funds to a particular organization. CUPS was big at that time. We would give money to CUPS or some other charity, usually involving children.

Catherine: This would have been very encouraging for young mothers and gave you a sense of community, I would imagine?

Meredith: It provided a huge sense of community. At that time, there was a mothers' group and we were involved in a Bible study. We supported each other when our children were small. There were many of us. The Sunday school had probably 15 children per class and there were eight classes.

Catherine: How much has changed from the 1980s to today in terms of the number of young children or the number of families with young children?

Meredith: I think part of that issue is that when I had small children there were a number of women who were still at home. Today women are working. My daughter-in-law is teaching and she has three small children, but she really doesn't have time on her weekend to commit to a volunteer activity; whereas, a lot of us were at home with our children.

Catherine: The 1980s were a watershed before women emerging from purely domestic roles. It had a lot of knock-on effects right across the board through society. What else besides the ACW were you involved with?

Meredith: I taught Sunday school for about 20 years. I also taught confirmation classes. I taught baptism classes up until about five years ago. Pat and I did it for a while together, but Kathy Chapman and I taught baptismal classes for parents wishing to have their children baptized or adults wanting to be baptized. We would run those kinds of classes.

I spent a lot of time on pastoral care and I really enjoyed it. William Pike brought me into pastoral care to be with a young mother who was dying. I journeyed with her for the year before she died, had a very lovely relationship with her children, and continue to see her children now. That was probably 24 years ago, but I've been very fortunate to be on a number of people's journeys as they were dying. It's hard to do, but it's very rewarding and these people take you into their confidences.

My pastoral care role has been in seniors' facilities and in the hospitals. If a parishioner is sick, I would go into the hospital and give them communion. In pastoral care we were each designated a certain number of senior facilities that we would go to. I had a few in the south, I would see anybody who was in Chinook Care Centre, Mayfair Care Centre, Staywell Manor, a few down south, and I did that up until about five years ago when we were traveling a lot and I just felt I couldn't give that kind of time.

I've seen a number of men at the Colonel Belcher, some veterans. I've really enjoyed that. I really did enjoy pastoral care. I ran the seniors lunch program for five years. I worked on collective kitchens, which was very interesting. I was in childcare, so you would see a lot of very high needs children who were from CUPS, while their mothers were being taught how to cook. I've had a lot of different roles.

Catherine: It would be wonderful if you had a list or a CV or just a history of what you have done in the parish.

You talked about being at the Colonel Belcher. How did you deal with the veterans and how they were dealing with things?

Meredith: I visited three different individuals at the Belcher for about eight years. The one that stands out in my mind actually was Charlie Gray, who grew up in Elbow Park, rode a horse around Elbow Park and the river. He was a Second World War vet, and unlike so many stories, his was very positive, happy. It was the highlight of his life to be in the Second World War in Italy. He loved opera. I visited him until he died. He was confined to a wheelchair when I was seeing him and then confined to bed, but I took communion once a month. I did that, I think for five to seven years.

Catherine: What a story. He rode his horse around Elbow Park.

Meredith: He did.

Catherine: This must have been in the 1930s?

Meredith: Yes. He grew up in East Elbow.

Catherine: East Elbow Park, I'm told, originally was a racetrack before the houses were built. Your story there just confirms that the horses were ridden in East Elbow Park in some form or another.

Meredith: It's an interesting story and you are right in that if we don't write it down, we have lost all this history.

Catherine: That's the pastoral care at Colonel Belcher, but you did it in other long-term care facilities, as well?

Meredith: Yes. I've been in most of the long-term care facilities in the Southwest in Calgary, seeing parishioners in various stages of their lives. Oftentimes they go into some of these facilities and are reasonably healthy, other times they are quite unwell.

Catherine: I know you have been involved with putting on some educational sessions for the congregation and one session was on medically assisted dying, which a lot of people found most

informative and very interesting. My question is, did you organize that as a result of what you were seeing at the end of life in long-term care or in hospitals?

Meredith: I was part of pastoral care at that time. I think Betty Craigie drove that presentation because within the pastoral team she was principally responsible for bereavement and for parishioners who had lost somebody. I think that she or Elizabeth Brain would have been the people who would have brought the speakers in. Elizabeth Brain is a doctor; she has done all the course works through the hospitals for pastoral care. I have done coursework, but through the Catholic Family Service. It's a different course.

Catherine: That pastoral care work that you've done has obviously been very important, but there are other things that you've done within the parish in more of an administrative way, you've been on Vestry, I think?

Meredith: I was on Vestry but not for very long. I'm not a particularly good Vestry member. I was the president of the Altar Guild for 10 to 12 years.

Catherine: Can you tell me about some of the other things that you've been doing in the parish?

Meredith: We continue, but during COVID, to provide seniors' luncheons four to five times a year. The collective kitchen has stopped because we were having difficulties with transportation. That involved getting parents who had children in the early childhood education at CUPS to come in, and we were teaching them basic budgeting kitchen skills and how to feed their children healthy meals. That carried on for about four years. I'm working on the outreach committee these days, which I'm really enjoying.

I have not taught baptism for a number of years now, because Brandon and Deanna Witwer have taken over that role. I was a confirmation mentor in the past couple of years.

I started in the Altar Guild in 1988. I have found that a very useful experience, because when I started I was a young woman and a lot of these older women really took me under their wing. It provided community and they were role models for me, in that they helped me parent and they helped me through a lot of challenging times. These women are no longer here, the Mary Selby generation.

Catherine: Who else do you recall from that era?

Meredith: Jean Funnell was wonderful. Pat Burns was so lovely to me. There are a number of women who are no longer here.

Catherine: Had you any time to work outside the parish in the community or was it through the parish into the community?

Meredith: I did a lot of work for choirs, because all my children were involved in choirs. I did a lot of work for the Calgary Boys Choir, the Calgary Girls Choir, Youth Singers. I've done a lot of

work for my children's schools. I've run a lot of bingos, a lot of casinos. I've done a lot of silent auctions. I've chaired silent auctions for the Calgary Girls Choir, Calgary Boys Choir. Yes, with four children, you tend to have to volunteer for all sorts of different things. I've always been involved in the schools that my children attended — parent council, that kind of thing.

Catherine: Speaking of choirs, do you sing yourself?

Meredith: No, I'm not a singer. I think singing is a life skill. All my children started at Mount Royal when they were three. They did a four-year program at Mount Royal and then they all went on to choirs. A couple of them think that I was a horrible parent for putting them in choir, but they can all sing. Pat can sing and he's had a lot of enjoyment from the choir and a lot of community from the choir.

Catherine: Did you go with Pat and the choir on the trips to England?

Meredith: Yes, I joined him on the one he went to in England in 2011, as well as a short tour to Victoria in 2019. Of course, the Christ Church Choir has been on many other tours before Pat was involved, but the tour to England was very special.

Catherine: St Paul's, Westminster Abbey.

Meredith: Yes, and we spent a week in Chichester, which was lovely. Pat and I have spent a lot of time in London. My parents lived in London on three occasions, so it was fun to be there.

Catherine: Did you hop across to Paris, as well?

Meredith: Yes, we have done that a number of times.

Catherine: When was the last time you were in London?

Meredith: In 2019.

Catherine: We've talked about from the 1980s up to the present. What are the major changes that you would note that have happened in the parish in those 40 years?

Meredith: I think there was a real change. When William Pike was there for 10 years, it was a very difficult time. A lot of people left the parish. It was very challenging for us in those 10 years, because many of our friends left. A huge number, actually. After William, came Ansley and that was truly a wonderful time. Ansley really contributed to the church starting to grow again.

I do think that the church is changing, and it's changing because families have so many demands on their time. Also, I think the Anglican Church is really struggling to feel relevant to the 30- and 40-year-olds, especially in our diocese with the leadership of the present bishop.

I can hardly blame my children for not attending when same-sex blessings are not affirmed. I think this Bishop has been a real problem and continues to be a real problem. You see growth in the churches on Vancouver Island and in Vancouver where they have a proactive Bishop who is addressing issues that are concerning to 30- to 50-year-olds. That is a real problem. I think for us in Calgary, it's only going to get worse. There are very few of our ministers in the City of Calgary who are on the left of center in their approach to spirituality.

Catherine: I would agree with you there, indeed. I think this question of relevance is a very important one, not only to the people in their 30s and 40s but especially to those in their teenage years and young 20s.

Meredith: Yes, without question.

Catherine: How do you think the Church can become more relevant in the language it uses, in the understanding of how science and technology is changing the world of the young people?

Meredith: I think we need more leadership like Brandon and Deanna Witwer, who can appeal to a younger audience and who have different ideas, be it Messy Church, which they have done, or be it Dance in Church. They are trying to move us in a direction that might be appealing to teenagers. My son Daniel's wife comes to church regularly with their three small children. He does not go but he is a very good friend of Brandon's. I fully expect him to show up one day.

The teenagers are hard to get, because the Anglican Church has never done youth particularly well. When my son Timothy was a teenager, he was involved with something called Young Life, which was extremely evangelical but it did get him through his teen years. I would have regularly 40 to 50 young teenagers in my basement who were involved with Young Life, so they did offer something.

Catherine: How can the Church speak in the language of the youth to deliver the message?

Meredith: I think that Deanna is making real inroads to building a Sunday school. Her heart wants to be a dancer. There were families coming from different churches, who had left those churches to come to the Christ Church Sunday School. I think it's leadership. I think you need those kinds of people like Deanna and Brandon to build up these core communities, because once these communities come together, they will stay together if there's something there for them.

With Greg as our Bishop, clergy who support full inclusion of the LGBTQ community wants to come to Calgary, so it's a big problem. Nobody wants to be here under this bishop. We continue to lose the Helen Dunn's, who was at the cathedral and is gay. She is a gifted clergy. I am convinced Anna Greenwood Lee left because she was not valued by the Bishop. Tara Livingston left the priesthood after being reprimanded by Greg. I don't know how we are going to salvage our parishes unless we divorce ourselves from the diocese.

Catherine: This is a very serious issue.

Meredith: It's very serious.

Catherine: We probably cannot do anything right now.

Meredith: No.

Catherine: It's very good to raise and state the issue and to have it there on file that people like you, like I, like others, of this opinion, we really can't do anything about it in the structure that we have.

Meredith: No, we can't and the longer Greg is there, the more he is recruiting people who think like he does and putting them in the rural parishes, so that when we go to our next Synod, we will be outvoted.

Catherine: Is that the strategy?

Meredith: It is the strategy and it's extremely disheartening. I remember Anna Greenwood Lee as a curate at Christ Church. She was a rising star, she's now a star!

Catherine: Yes.

Meredith: Helen Dunn was a rising star. We're losing clergy who see the Bible in a historical context as opposed to a literal context, which is a problem. My son doesn't want to come and listen to somebody like Greg, who sees the Bible literally. We need to be relevant to the 20-40 year olds.

Catherine: Yes, it is serious.

Meredith: It's extremely serious. I have always found something positive about all of our clergy. We have been blessed with extraordinary leadership: Barry Curtis, Sally Boyles, Herb O'Driscoll, Richard Lesuer, Kathy Zang, William Pike, Ansley Tucker, Helen Belcher, David Pickett. We've had some great clergy at Christ Church and we've been very fortunate. It's very unfortunate that David Pickett is becoming more isolated as each one of these clergy in other parishes in the diocese leaves for something more affirming. When David came, he thought he could change Greg's opinion, but it is not possible.

Catherine: Well, we should perhaps leave that there.

What other aspects of your life at Christ Church would you like to talk about or like to raise as a question or a statement?

Meredith: I think the biggest thing that Christ Church has offered me and my family is a sense of community. I feel like I've had so many long relationships with people in the congregation and I have certainly benefited hugely from the inter-generational relationships. There were people

that I would not probably normally see that I have an opportunity to get to know. I think it's difficult for families to raise their children and be in a marriage in a vacuum.

The community of Christ Church has allowed for me to be surrounded by people that have supported me on my journey, which has been very reassuring and given me a huge amount of strength. I don't know how my children will do it without a faith group.

Catherine: You and Pat, plus the congregation and your friends, have modelled values to our next generation. Our kids will find their way. It won't be couched in the same language. It won't necessarily be doing the same kind of worship or things that have worked for us. They will find their way to express their spiritual quest in a different way. We have to have confidence in that.

Thank you so very much, Meredith, for being very open and positive about what Christ Church has meant in your lives as a family.

Meredith: Thanks, Catherine.